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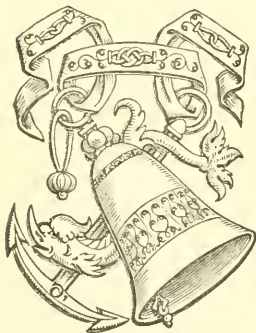
ORROWS OF HYPsipYLE.

THE SORROWS OF
HYSIPYLE,

BY

THOMAS ASHE:

AUTHOR OF "PICTURES" AND OTHER POEMS.



LONDON:

BELL AND DALDY, 186, FLEET STREET.

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INTERLOCUTORS.

HYPSIPYLE *Queen of Lemnos.*

THOAS, *Father of Hypsipyle.*

IASON,	}	<i>Argonauts.</i>
CASTOR,		
HERACLES,		
CALAIS,		
ORPHEUS,		
IDMON,		

IPHICLES, *King of Melitis.*

HELIODORA,	}	<i>Priestesses of Herè.</i>
ÆGLE,		
IPHISSA,		

AGLAIA, *Priestess of Athenè.*

PRIESTESSES.

ATTENDANTS.

LEMNIAN WOMEN.

NURSE.

NEREIDS.

SCENE: LEMNOS.

PART I.

SCENE I.

HYPsipyle.

WOULD any child of woman choose to live,
If he could have the choice, and could
foresee,

Before his birth, the ills that should befall?
I know not if to account myself the most
Unhappy, as a heaven-anointed queen,
Or daughter, or a wife. Like one unskill'd,
Who seeks to yoke the untutor'd colt, so I,—
Sway'd this way now, now that way,—strive in
vain

To rule the intractable women : and I am
But queen in name : unless ye will to call
Me queen of sorrows, which might well be true.
And yet, ah ! yet, what yield ye, at the best,
Who crown me, if the sweetly-chanting doves

Of home-nursed bliss abide not in the halls?
And mother's guerdon, and a matron's joys,
In dew-fresh children and her lord's fond eyes?
O vainly crown'd! not even a queen can bid
Sorrow to flee, nor bind the cloud-soft wings
Of beauteous Love, sweet Love! Alas! my soul!
For all the god-sent largess of the heavens!
Who in his mind would wish for it, or call
It evil or well? For they have given to me
A tender heart, but many griefs with it;
And intricate duties, but no iron will.

O bitter curse, fallen upon the land!
And unwash'd stain, beside! which without stint
Is expiated, and without a thought
Of difference betwixt the innocent ones,
And those not so: till some would dare surmise
That even the gods, when angry, are scarce just.
But who shall fix a term to evil days,
When heaven is adverse, and the people sin?

For Aphroditè's altars were the prey
Of guilty desecration ; and the grass
Grew in the untrodden courts, and throve at will :
The blue-neck'd swallows from their clay-built
homes,

Beneath the entablatures, were scared away :
And all her sacred roses were untrimm'd.
And at the last the unhappy people set
The sharp axe to her hallow'd myrtle-grove.
And, in her passionate anger, she would not
O'erlook it, nor forgive : but with her art
So made the Lemnian women utterly
Hateful in their lords' eyes, that these forsook
The wives loved tenderly of old : and them,
Being overcome with sleep and with the feast,
The unhappy women desperately dismiss'd
To Hades, in one night, and were avenged.

'Tis not the guilty only, who atone,
When evil deeds are done. At least, I share

The punishment, who did not share the guilt.

Yet it may be I, too, confederate

In their wild oath, persuaded by their words,—

Not thinking they would keep the oath, ah,

me!—

Have even my fair reward: for to be weak

And unresolved, then, when we should be strong,

Is well-nigh one with guilty. O my sire!—

If heaven divines, keen-eyed, the false from

true,—

Plead for thy child in this, who rescued thee,

And led thee through the unlitten gloom, suspect

Of none, to Herè's temple, in the bay:

Holding to kill thee with an impious hand

A thing more loathsome than an oath forsworn.

When this ship Argo on the Lemnian shore

Touch'd, with its wandering crew, the women

found

New wedlock. I myself became the wife

Of world-renown'd Iason, their dear lord,—
And mine : so pleased the others ; and am call'd
Mother by soft child-lips : and I have grown
To love him, even to trust him, for the son.
And now the entangling net of grief again
Is woven anew, with the sweet bands of love.
For we shall be lorn widows ere the god
Flash, with bright wheels, a splendour in the
dawn.

Will he return ? will he return ? O, fear !
How many a night, in sleep, a dreadful doubt
Shapes phantoms in my brain ! I seem to watch
One pacing restless a dim shore afar ;
Plotting, and full of schemes : who never casts
A stray glance seaward, as he would begone.
Will he forget this isle, his Lemnian home ?
For thoughts of women do not vex him much
Mid cares of men. And yet he has not been,
Even for an hour, unkind : I well can think

Iason will be true. 'Tis not so wise
To trust in every dream, even if it were
A strange one, which I had : for fear brings
dreams :

And subtle love, with secret art, will keep
The limbs uneasy on the couch all night.
Stir not this fear, lest, like a smouldering fire,
Which else would languish, it but flame the more.
Yet at the least he is about to tempt
An untried, dangerous way. His feet will roam,
'Mong unknown men, upon a venturous quest.
Of dangers to be faced, which seems the worst,—
Uncivil peoples, or a stormy sea ?
And at the least this absence will be long.
Who can forethink what evil days may break
Above the old man, my sire, when friends are
gone :

Whom foes encompass, and a nameless fear ;
Here, unprotected, in the lonely isle,
With me, me only ? It can ne'er be so.

Ah, will ye tell me,—if, perchance, ye hear
My lamentation, strong invisible Ones,—
Ah, will ye tell me it can prove indeed
So happy a lot, to be a father's all ;
And in the long vague years not clasp again
My arms about his neck, as I was wont ?
Seems once to wed, in days not all too bright,
A husband, and to look on him, mayhap,
No more, to teach my heart his eyes are true,
To you a fate so happy, heavenly Ones ?
I shall be sick for love, go seeking love :
As, in parch'd Argos, Amymone roam'd,
Bearing, on her tired head, the urn in vain.

SCENE II.

IASON.

LADY, unwillingly, I come, to say
Farewell, for a little season.

HYPSIPYLE.

Ah, so soon !

IAS.

Is it so soon ? It is the third spring, now,
Our hearts have linger'd, love-bewitch'd, among
The sea-ring'd Lemnian hills. Now all's aboard.
Our loitering bark rocks, restless, in the creek.
The new-hewn oars, of trusty Lemnian fir,
Are stow'd away. And ere the moon sets low,—
As thou, too, knowest,—we sail : we must be
gone.

HYP.

Will ye foredoom the unhappy women thus ?

IAS.

Canst thou not think 'tis better to deceive,
Than be deceived of them ? If we betray
Their trust, to shield them, 'tis a kindly wrong.
Avoiding many a fruitless tear, we go ;
And unsuspect of any, save by thee.

HYP.

Deceit can scarce be noble : heavenly Powers
Ne'er chanted this to thee, in oracles.
But, son of Æson, is thy heart so glad
To leave thy wife ? I would that I were dead.

IAS.

Shall hard gods ask, and we not yield to them ;
Even if they take the things we would withhold ?
Have they not said ? Yet not so willingly,
Lady, we leave thee, as we shall return,
When we have grasp'd the glittering prize we
seek.

Too long, too long, we have linger'd here, O
queen.

HYP.

Too long? ah, true! by Hymen's sleepy eyes!
Or else not long enough! Is it so fit,
Brides of three springs, and mothers of a year,
Sit solitary, and weep, upon the hearth?
Lovest thou me? who would believe it true?

IAS.

Why weepest thou, like a girl? Was it in vain
We had such trust in thee? Should we have told
Our secret to the listening waves alone?
Shall I regret we have not stolen away
From thee, as from the others? Then, be still.

HYP.

I should have known, I should have known, false
friend!
Did I not, oft, behind the willowy screen,

Mark the unusual bustle on the shore ?
Nor see the unwonted labour, day by day,
Secretly expedited, dost thou think ?
Nor watch them paint the wave-beat prow anew,
Annealing, with soft wax, the scarlet glow ?
I see thee smile :—ye did suspect me, then ;
And made my trust your friend, lest I should set
The murderous women on your stealthy work,
At least a match for treacherous lords of old.

IAS.

We meant not to beguile thee ; nor did we :
We trusted thee in this. Thine eyes, we knew,
Love not so much the blood of gory wounds.
We, not so given to sleep, that we should let
The bright blades gleam around us, unapprised,—
'Tis better, surely, we should steal away
Thus secretly : thou thinkest it, in thine heart.
Hypsipyle, dear wife, be not so wroth.

HYP.

Alas, me ! now, I can divine full well
The ambiguous oracle, which once was dark !
Thus,—while I laugh'd, a tiny child, they say,—
The Delphic priestess sang : “ She will not wed
A Lemnian, but some stranger : he will come,
In his beak'd ship, across the dangerous wave.”
So much, thou knowest, proved true : but more
she sang.

For, shuddering, as she chanted, she beheld
Their heaven-appointed mother slay his sons :
Unpitying, with fierce hate : and they were two.
I, grown a woman, heard it ; wondering
If one such mother lived ; nor dream'd her me.
But since thy child was given me,—and I was
Most glad for him,—I tremble to behold
This treasure, trusted to my hands, unsure :
Bewilder'd, pondering line by line again
The metric sweetness of the pregnant song,

To unravel some strange clue : for oracles
Are not so clear at all times, and ally
Their words to alien senses, which perplex.
But now this is most clear,—thou wilt espouse
Some other, even to prove their bane, and thine.

IAS.

O nurses' tales, which still'd thee, when a child !
Thou wilt not murder two, who hast but one.

HYP.

Ah. now, thou lovest to mock me !—Him, too,
see !

Euneus, thy little son, thou leavest him,
Ere he has learn'd to utter thy dear name.
And who will teach him, with the eagle-plume
To win swift arrows to surprise the mark ?
To handle sword or spear ? be brave, like thee ?
For here are only women, till his peers,
The other orphan'd friendless ones, are grown.

IAS.

Scarce need we doubt the children will be true,
Whose mothers are half warriors. But how soon
We shall return, thou lovest to forget.
Wilt thou be wailing still, as if we went
O'er gloomy Styx, to Hades at the least?

HYP.

Can I forget the inhospitable lands,
The adverse winds, black waves? for ye will not
Avoid all these! now, ever since I knew
Thy will to go, my brain is dark and wild,
With nameless terrors and unquiet fears.
If winds are changeable, are men less so?
Here, I can well believe, thy love would hold.
But absence changes love: new faces please
Weak, fickle men the best. I had a dream;—
Three times I dream'd it, and it will not soon
Be laugh'd away. I saw upon the shore
The wretched Ariadne, piteously,

Stretch out vain hands for Theseus, who was
gone.

And while I watch'd her face, it changed to mine.

IAS.

Yea, now 'tis clear thou canst not love me much,
By thy continual oracles and dreams.
For true love is most glad to cast away
Unkind suspicion. I would prove to thee,
By any deed soever, my fast truth.
What canst thou ask of me, I will refuse ?

HYP.

O stubborn heart ! it is in vain I plead,
Thinking to hold thee still ! I'll ask a boon.

IAS.

A holier trust breaks in thine eyes anew ;
Like sunlight through blue mist, or failing rain.
What wouldst thou ask of me ?

—What would she now ?

What will the woman ask ? I was a fool.

HYP.

Knowest thou Thoas lives ?

IAS.

Thy sire !

HYP.

'Tis so.

IAS.

What meanest thou ? can men live, whose hearts
are dust ;

Whose ashes stir not in the silent urn ?

Yea, they can live,—in Pluto's gloomy realm.

HYP.

His heart no urn keeps yet. Now hear me, thou.
There is a secret passage, which he wrought,
With happy forethought, in a prosperous time,
Through many a year, beneath the noiseless ground.
Like moles they shaped it, from the royal home,
To Herè's temple in the little creek.

For he, like thee, had mark'd, with curious eye,
The sheltering bay. Through many a dripping
 gloom,
Myself I led him from the evil night.
Now Herè guards him, by the willowy brook.

IAS.

The lynx-eyed, crafty Lemnians,—were they
 blind ?

HYP.

Believest thou me ? These slender fingers held
The flickering torch in air, and lit the pyre,
And swiftly-kindling wood ; and poured thereon
Sweet-smelling perfumes, and the oil and wine.
Uplift to win the useful winds to aid,
These hands, thou seest, the sad procession led ;
And clash'd the glittering cymbals, while the feet
Moved to the melancholy chant along,
To the ominous left, in sorrow. It were strange,

Even if we kill'd, with a revengeful hand,
A traitorous King, we should not mourn for him.

IAS.

O joy !

HYP.

'Twere joy indeed, if he were safe.
But now this fear makes every hour move slow,—
Lest some stray foot should find him. As thou
lovest

Hypsipyle, bear the old man with thee :
And when thou seest a people, which have learn'd
To succour kings unhappy, leave with them
This precious burden of a king, true friend.

IAS.

The queen thinks well : yet how shall it be done ?

HYP.

When sets the wandering moon ? Thou shalt
behold

Two women, lingering by the tardy ship.
Then know the old man is with them, in the
gloom.

IAS.

Thou hast a Lemnian's aptness for a plot.
Yet fail not of the hour, Hypsipyle.

HYP.

Ah, now thou wilt be gone! yet once again
These eyes will fix thee, when the glimmering
dawn

Breaks in the East:—most sadly will it break.
Once, yet, I shall behold thee! I will go
To comfort the old man, and mourn with him:
And part from him,—ah, me! who will remain?
He shall not fail! he shall not fail! believe!
Heaven look on thee, Iason.

IAS.

—Heavenly Gods!

The queen is gone. I would not do her wrong.

She is most gentle-hearted. Yet she has
A hidden strength, if she were cross'd too much :
A slumbering will, to fear, if one should hurt
The trust she lays in him. Ah, subtle wit,
Beneath moist tears ! I would remain her friend.
The old man will prove a trouble : he shall find
A sheltering nook ere long. The old should die ;
Whose flickering light grows dark, whose tremb-
ling hand
Forgets to grasp the glittering oar, or spear.

SCENE III.

HYPsipyle.

HELIODORA, lead me : where is he ?

HELIODORA.

Within the sacred willow-grove he sits
Of golden-sandall'd Herè, by the brook ;
In the accustom'd spot ; and is not all
Unhappy, as some might fancy.

HYP.

Poor old king !

HEL.

But let thy feet pause in the moss-soft grass,
And listen ; for I hear him muttering low.
This is his way, when busy phantoms weave
Their moonlight dances in his darken'd brain.

He thinks not any one is near, to catch
The worded echoes of his wandering dreams.

HYP.

What to the babbling water mutters he,
And the pure lilies about his feet asway ?

HEL.

Wilt thou not listen, and we shall hear, O queen.

THOAS.

If I could not look back,—ah, no ! no ! no !
Look onward ! fallen king ! Then there is much
To make life sweet. This sunlight is a boon,
With heaven-sent beams pavilioning the world :
But when the warm light softens in her eyes,
There rains a richer bounty from her look.
Since Iphianassa left me, my true wife,
I have borne grief enough :—ah, poor lost friends !
Let me not think on you !—and still the child
Has been more help to me than all the woe.

Will she not come?—child? child? the weary
steeds

Draw down the flaming chariot of the sun;
And haste to plunge beneath the cool sea-wave
Their restless feet. Will she not come? The
sound

Of her light foot is sweeter to mine ear
Than nightingales, whose music charms the
gloom.

HYP.

How will he bear this parting? How shall I
Be soothed for it, dear friend? who shall be left
Orphan'd and widow'd ere the stars grow wan.

THO.

Did I not hear her voice?

HYP.

My sire! my sire!

THO.

Child, art thou near me? wherefore weepest
thou?

HYP.

Will not this bindweed, see! be withering soon,
Whose clinging stem some priestess has untwined?

THO.

Yea, child: but why these tears? why cling to
me,
As bindweeds do to friendly bough or vine?

HYP.

Ever again, ah me! again, ah me!
Shall I fast hold thee, as I hold to-night?

THO.

Ha! wilt thou leave me, then? why now, why
now,
These strange words, wandering, and this look so
wild?

HYP.

It is not I, but thou that goest: ah, me!

THO.

Believe it not. Who hath belied me, child?

HYP.

Be still! be still! speak not vain words! Be
still!

What if the Lemnians find thee? knowest thou
well

Athene shields Iason? and thy way,
In the long ship, leads to a sheltering land.

THO.

Iason? whither will he lead me, then?

Goeth Iason, and not thou, not thou?

HYP.

Ay me! Ay me!

THO.

Ah, will she die, poor queen ?
Wounded with heart-deep sorrows wonderfully ?

HYP.

He goeth : Iason goeth : and they all :
Athene wills it : but they will return.

THO.

Wilt thou believe them ? Yet I go not, I.
Whom wouldst thou have to love, if I were gone ?
And whom to live for ? even a greater care.

HYP.

Wilt thou not yield ? It must be : yea ! say, yea !
Thou wilt not cross me thus ! should I crave so,
If no need were, to weep alone, forlorn ?

THO.

Canst thou believe that any more my soul
Keeps wish to mingle with the harmful world ?

With little-minded men, whose eyes are blind ?
The strife, the wrangling, for poor shreds of power ;
The wild ambition for a thorny seat
Of chieftdom, mid deform'd and motley fools :—
I have seen enough : I would not be a king,
Or wear a crown, again. Now thy dear heart
Beguiles thee, with its restless succouring love,
To think I am not happy : yet I am.
Ah, thinkest thou I could sit, brow-crown'd, to
rule

Some new strange people ? could I bear to see
Their love, their service ? thinking,—all too much
For any peace,—of mine of old ; lost ! lost !
My warriors, eagles, comrades in the hunt ;
Wise-hearted, brave ones, princely revellers ;
Would come, disconsolate, with unquiet eyes,
About my court, and chide me, from their tombs.
Let me feel sure still here,—how much remains.
Have I not thee ? and if I held not thee,
This sacred shelter, with its heavenly flowers ;

Its willowy shade ; its ever-grateful sun ;
O'er which the holy goddess keeps her watch
From morn to eve, from eve to morn ; the breeze,
Which spares,—made mild and supple to her
will,—

Rudely to stir one leaf : these were enough
To wing the hours of an old man, my child.
Whither should I go sail, dethroned, half-blind,
To breast the waves of sorrowing days anew ?
Nay, child ! nay, child ! as soon my lost recross
Black Acheron, to prop these faltering feet.
The strength, and will, and heartening hopes of
youth,
Have perish'd and gone, and will not be again.

HYP.

Wilt thou not go ? so, listen ! I pray no more.
Thou wilt be found, and this will prove the end
Of two lives,—thine and mine. Could I behold
These white and fluttering locks, with many a
stain

Of blood and blackening dust? But this goes
well.

For I shall never see it, but die before.

Lovest thou me? and thinkest thou my brief term

Of life were worth a breath, if thou wert found?

And now I know some prying eye will come,

And catch thee wandering in the grove. Long
since

This thought has been a haunting fear: for this

I have suffer'd pangs ere now: but there was
once

The fair protection of the friendly band.

'Twas much: 'twas all: and ere the sun again

Shall round the headland of the lonely bay,

They will be gone. Then I shall yield my life,

A vain, but willing gift, for thy dear good.

And what wilt thou do then, wilt thou do then?

THO.

Thy life, thou sayest?—I go.—Thy life, my child?

Where is he? lead me.

HYP.

O stay ! not yet ! not yet !
Not till the moon dips seaward tempteth he
The waves, ah, me ! Sit here, sit here, awhile ;
Playing with my loosed tresses, as of old !

THO.

Even the pitying fates have left me still
One little hour, in which to hold my joy.
It is too much, ye powers !—Is this your art,
To draw me, darkling, to the dizzy edge
Of some supreme despair ?—But round my neck
Lay thy soft arms, while on the bench we sit.
Not for my kingdom back, and many a year
Of sweet life with it, would I yield this hour.

HEL.

What breast shall prop the weary head, what
arms
Wreathe him thus gently, in the years to be ?

Fondling the old man in her grief, she seems
A simple child again. Yet not the child
Whom I loved once :—O, sadder ! I think we
 had
Less rueful looks, when we were used to play,
In life's fresh morning, on the sunny hill.

SCENE IV.

ÆGLE.

IPHISSA, once again I watch with you
The light die off Mosychlus' misty brow.
How oft, beneath this green pomegranate tree,
We have heard the shrill cicada! Listen, now!
I love the sound: and yet 'tis almost harsh.

IPHISSA.

Here we see well the willowy grove below,
And every hill beyond.

ÆGL.

Unmark'd by us
No foot can steal on them. Thou wast most wise
To choose this spot. Now who would deem we
two

Were sentinels; stretch'd on so smooth a turf,
And lingering, it must seem, but for delight ?

IPH.

Sweet Ægle, wherefore hast thou wreathed thy
brow

With down-soft leaves of sacred dittany ?

ÆGL.

The goddess, whom we serve, Iphissa best,
Loveth the snow-pale flowers.

IPH.

Nay, Ægle, now :
Thine eyes betray thy soul. Wilt thou speak true.

ÆGL.

Thou knowest, thou knowest, Iphissa.

IPH.

No, child : no.

ÆGL.

For is not this the eve I came to you?

This hour crowns me vow'd priestess, like the
rest.

Grapes have been trodden, with the dancing
feet

Of laughing maidens; vines are green again,—
Since I came here,—on fruitful Thasos' shore.

My native planes still droop, still seem to watch
Their slumbering reflex in the amber bays.

But none shall find me in the dells I loved,
Nor praise mine eyes, again : and this brings
tears.

And yet, in truth, ye have been kind, most kind.

IPH.

Well I remember when thou camest at first ;
Bringing the little image of heaven's queen,
Carved of sweet olive root : and we were pleased.

ÆGL.

So I remember the bewildering dance
Ye wreathed around it. O the rhythmic chant,—
Strange to mine ear,—ye sang ! while, from the
 cup,
Heliodora, like a bacchanal,
Pour'd out the clear ambrosia, honey-sweet ;
Wreathing the silver lip with yellow wool.
Then thou, the kindest of them all, I think,
Spakest to me,—such soft words, that I wept.

IPH.

I loved thee, from the first, my little one :
Because thou wert a child. Thou hadst no art,
Nor subtlety : but with such simple trust
Didst make a solemn vow. That night we
 watch'd,
Beneath this very stone, here at my foot,
The lizard glide away. Sweet, I know well

Thou longest to ask this secret, which we hid ;
Fostering thy strength a year ; not of mistrust.

ÆGL.

Gentle Iphissa, now I will not ask.

IPH.

But I will tell thee. Thou hast heard the tale
Of that strange hate : when Lemnian women slew
Their unsuspecting lords ; and reap'd a curse ;
And made their guilt a proverb in the world.
Thou thinkest the king fell victim, with the rest :
But hear, he lived.—Why lookest thou so, my
child ?

Hypsipyle, the queen,—their queen is named
Hypsipyle ?—his daughter, kept him safe.
But he stands not the kingly tower he was ;
But fallen, and changed. Dead is the king ! yea,
true !

This king was like the eagle, which—look, now !
Sweeps, from yon hidden eyrie on the crag,

Swift down blue glens beyond. But he, who lives,
Is like some dove, which wheels a homely flight
Round low-built cot, and settles on the ground.
Thy face is lit, thine eyes flash brightly with,
Thy lips are parted in, a wild surprise.

ÆGL.

He is the king ! She is the queen, his child !
Ah, poor lost king !

IPH.

Thou speak not of him so.

He was heaven-born. Him Ariadne bore,
In snow-capp'd Naxos, to her comforter,
Sleep-giving Dionysus. Ægle, sweet,
He had a noble heart. Even in grave age,
Sinewy and strong he throve. He was a king,
Subtle to judge, right generous to forgive ;
Wise to convict, yet wary to condemn ;
Well-skill'd to rule, where ruling was most hard.
But after that wild night ; confused ; o'erwhelm'd

With strange, bewildering brooding on grim fate ;
With ghastly fancying of the doom of friends ;
With all trust turn'd to doubt, all sweet to gall ;
His hair grew white, his strong limbs reeds. And
when,

At last, he seem'd himself, he was a child :
No more himself:—ah ! never think, that one,
The glory, and strong bulwark, of this land !
Now, nought, but gentleness, grown feebleness,
Sweet love, turn'd doating, hints what he was once.
Alas ! cross'd heart ! our unbefriended queen !
She has borne all ! Good sooth, her face is sad :
Which was of old like some fresh rose for bloom.

ÆGL.

Heaven keep her, now !

IPH.

Love, she stays late to-night.
The snows on Athos' hazy peak grow dark.
Soft in the lull'd Ægean floats a star.
I fear, I fear, new trouble skulks afoot.

SCENE V.

IASON.

SONS of the gods, illustrious, is there one,
Of all our crew, who is not here, aboard ?

CASTOR.

None, son of Æson : all are here.

IAS.

'Tis well.

CAS.

The glimmering morn breaks fair : the oars are
set :

Tiphys, expectant, waiteth by the helm.

IAS.

Hypsipyle delayeth. . It is strange.

HERACLES.

By Zeus, I would the bloody Lemnians
Had slain the old man, too ! Would he were laid,
A shell-encrusted skeleton, weed-crown'd,
In glittering grottoes of the white-foot nymphs,
'Neath rock and ripple of the briny wave !
Still must we linger here ; while yon pale beams
Are brightening in the region of the dawn ?

IDMON.

Vex'd is the heart of Heracles.

HER.

'Tis well

It should be vex'd,—I lying here, alone,
Three wasted lingering springs, in sun and rain ;
Stretch'd like a weed upon a tide-left strand,
Guarding the ship, and eating out my heart
I would not set a foot upon the shore,
To be mad women's laughter, and their thrall.

CAS.

In this most wise wast thou : forsooth, too much
Their theme for laughter in the days of old.

ID.

Vex not the hero with vain words, my son.

CALAIS.

Iason, leader of a kingly band,
Shall we unloose the deftly-twisted rope ?
The old man will prove a trouble, ere the end.
And this slow lingering in the creek is ill.

ORPHEUS.

Worse ill the bond of honourable men
Should be dishonour'd, for a paltry gain :
If it be gain, to be dishonourable.
'Twere better watch the morning star grow pale,
Than sun-bright honour, and truth's sacred light.

ID.

Now, by the Muse Calliope's clear eyes,
Which with their speckless truth Apollo won,

'Twas well and nobly spoken. To begin
The long strange voyage with a treacherous deed ;
With lying lips, which are alike the scorn
Of noble men and of the heavenly gods ;
Were but cross'd omen of a sure return.
He comes, behold ! with weak and tottering feet.

CAS.

The temple's shadowy gloom obscures them still :
I see their white robes move along the dark.
With eyes bent toward the ground, the wanderer
 rests
One hand on each smooth shoulder, as they come.

IAS.

Rise, sons of gods, bareheaded : he is old.
O daughter of the noble Thoas, say,
Why hast thou linger'd till the dawn grows
 bright ?

HYPSIPYLE.

Is it the dawn so soon, with hurrying beams ?

But lead ye, friends, along the treacherous plank,
His faltering foot with care, with care, I pray.

ORPH.

How venerable is the old man's look !
His glittering eyes are bright as wave-wet gems :
His locks are soft and silken as a child's.

THOAS.

Adventurous wanderers on the windy sea,
Because ye stoop to yield, with willing hands,
An old man aid, your expedition find
A prosperous end.

ALL.

We thank thee, noble king.

IAS.

Why comes yon hurrying priestess hitherward ?

HEL.

She brings some news, perchance.

Speak ! Ægle, speak !

ÆGLE.

O lady, on the hills, o'er whose broad ridge,
Beyond our ken, the slumbering city lurks,
We have beheld a glittering light of spears.

HER.

Draw in the plank in haste : delay ye still ?

CAS.

Comrades, the hunt is up : the game are we.
Unwilling were their hearts to trust too much
The heaven-sent strangers.

IAS.

We are safe, my friends.

HER.

Unloose the rope : push off : let us be gone.
Awake the fresh foam with the plunging oar.

HYP.

Entreat the old man kindly. Ah, me ! see !
The wandering tears upon his cheek are wet.
He sees me not : his weary eyes grow dim.

HELIODORA.

Iason waves his glittering spear, O queen.

HYP.

The light goes with them. Is it morn, dear friend ?
I think it is the night, till their true prow
Shall touch again the rugged Lemnian strand.
O sweet hope dies away ! gone with the sound
Of their bright oars, which o'er the wave grows
faint !

HEL.

Grieve not, heart's sister, queen Hypsipyle,
Before the time.

HYP.

How sayest thou "before" ?

Iason, when the Asian goal is won,

Will think upon the boy, and steer again
The lofty-prow'd ship hitherward :—'twill be
A long time first. But the old man is gone.
He has few years to live : shall I behold
His sorrowing eyes again ? And who will keep
His feet like me, who am his child, his child ?

HEL.

Ha ! hearest thou the baffled women's cry ?
Now have they seen them, as they swerved away
To seaward, past the rocky western cliff.
The rout is near ! the rout is near, O queen !
Then haste with me : for would it be so well
Their troop should find us loitering in the bay ?

HYP.

That, surely, were not well : we will be gone.
I would have gladly watch'd the vessel sail
Beyond the dim line, where the deep is mix'd
With heaven's clear blue. See, Heliodora, see !
The bright morn flashes on the oars, brass-bound !

SCENE VI.

NEREIDS.

WHO is the woman, stealing away
Noiselessly, from the quiet bay ;
By the slippery path the goat's hoof has
Worn at will in the mountain grass ?
Combing the briny foam
From our locks on the yellow sand,
By the cliffs we mark'd her come,
By the rock we saw her stand.
Crouch'd like a leopard ere her spring,
She eyed the queen and the white-hair'd king.

Ship Argo, ship, from a land divine,
Whose lusty ribs of native pine
The fast-succeeding waves, in vain,
Lash with the wandering brine ;—
Sailing away o'er the deep again ;

Say, camest thou before
Unhappily, or happily,
To this sad Lemnian shore ;
With leaf of olive crown'd :
And bringing o'er the windy sea
The heroes world-renown'd ?

Yet the irresistible will
Of the unerring Ones,
Throned on the Olympian hill
On everlasting thrones,
Bade you bend your course to the rocky shore :
Who brought, no doubt, to the husbandless
Women, in their bitterness,
Joy at the first, though it remains no more.
Ye are happy, whom the gods
Have kept safe, against such odds :
Ye whom no ill-hap has found,
Even on this ill-omen'd ground.

The history recount to me,
O pale-eyed sisters of the sea,—
Each chapleted with lilies, while she sings,—
How in long days ago,
Through sunny cycles olden,
On woody Pelion,
In Thessaly the golden,
Were added, year by year, the stealthy rings,
To many a windy pine :
How oozing, glutinous juices
Fitted for noble uses
Each comrade of the brine.

Then the son of Æson bent
The strong wood to his great intent.
He fashion'd many a fan-like oar :
And, toiling with a lusty heart,
He built, complete in every part,
His vessel, on the shore.
Like a winged dragon lay

The wonder, in the lonely bay.

He cover'd every plank with tough,

Well-temper'd hides, the storms to rough :

And he remember'd to anneal,

'Gainst brine and worm, the oaken keel.

Then he proclaim'd Athene's will

Throughout the listening land :

From citadel on crowned hill,

From seaport ring'd with sand,

He call'd the heroes, in the name

Of murder'd Phrixus ; and they came.

He sang a grave Pelasgian chant

Of noble valour militant.

He sang of seas, whose billows roll'd

On Colchian shores, with angry swell ;

And of the fleece, like veined gold,

Or bright Narcissus in the dell.

Stout-heartedly and joyfully

They shouted, and were glad :

For wild adventure on the sea

A ready will they had.

With helmets in the heat aflame,

The twins of swan-white Leda came ;

Obedient to the call :

The sons of Boreas, too, were there ;

Idmon, the seer, Apollo's son ;

The sad Alcmena's paragon ;

And Orpheus, the sweet lute-player :

And fifty came, in all.

Iason, on the lofty poop,

Pray'd to their sires divine ;

And from the flashing golden cup

Pour'd forth the brighter wine :

And call'd on Father Zeus to aid,

And Winds, and Days, and Nights ;

While the propitious lightnings play'd

Around, with forked lights.

And thus they sail'd that day :

To Orpheus' song they row'd along,

Upon their royal way.

O ship, thou shalt be safe, though storms may lower :

Of whom Athene made the plan :

Who taught at first inventive man

To build sea-crossing barks ; and gave the power

To tame the unruly waves, and bend

The billows to a noble end.

Thy keel the willing goddess gave,

Of Dodonæan oak renown'd :

From oak-groves, where the dove-notes have

A deep oracular sound.

From the dense foliage, where they brood,—

Those birds, oracular,—

The bark she cut, the wood she hew'd,

By light of mystic star.

And from Olympus' height Zeus look'd, and smiled

Propitious, as they went,

By wondrous charm beguiled

Of that strange track : and Cheiron sent

Great echoes from his rocks, to see ;

And Pelion's nymphs gazed wonderingly.

They shall sail unhurt : their course

A prosperous one shall be,
By narrow Bosphorus,
And Euxine's brackish sea.

The sacred anchor, from the stern,

They shall never need to cast :

But when the wandering rocks are pass'd,
And for the end their spirits yearn ;

Then the heights of stainless snow,
Beyond the cities where they go,
Shall lure them in the eve, and burn

Like watchfires, with the sunset glow.

Yet woe, for Heracles, sailing in vain :

Great-hearted, but unblest'd by fate :
Seeking, over the Mysian plain,
The beautiful Hylas, disconsolate.

SCENE VII.

1ST WOMAN.

YE widow'd women of the Lemnian isle,
Whither away so fast?

2ND W.

Why speakest thou
Of widows, Lemnian? Thou, too, hast beheld
Yon dreamlike phantom of a ship we knew,
Cleaving the misty deep with flying oars.
Canst thou reveal the secret of their flight?
For we divined some mystery, when we found
The sharp-tooth'd hounds, uncoupled, in their place.

1ST W.

This is no mystery,—that the men are gone.

3RD W.

Will they return? Speak! What is it thou
knowest?

Where is it thy feet have been ? Why lookest thou
So scared, as if grim Pluto once again
Had risen, as erst in Enna ?

4TH W.

Was it well
Thou didst not warn us ? Did they speak to thee
Of their design ?

1ST W.

I could not warn ye, friends.
But will ye listen ? Why will ye delay
The message which I bring ye, wildering me ;
Asking so many questions in a breath ?

3RD W.

Hast thou betray'd us ? Ha ! But thou wilt rue
This treachery, wretched woman !

1ST W.

Ye have been
Betray'd, no doubt, but not of me : now, hear.

But speak good words, I pray : am I not, too,
A sufferer, with you all ? There fell to me
A pleasant prize, in Tiphys, my good lord.
Went he not with the crew ? I heard him laugh,
By no means mournfully, when he beheld
The sharp prow fret the baffled waves to foam.

2ND W.

Women of Lemnos, ye awhile be still,
And let us listen what she has to tell.

4TH W.

Say what thou knowest : speak, then.

2ND W.

Will ye be still.

1ST W.

The heroes, first, deceived us, craftily,
With pretext of a hunt.

3RD W.

Thus much we knew.

4TH W.

Hast thou no more ?

2ND W.

Thou cease thy babbling talk.

1ST W.

But I, who saw them whispering in the gloom,
Suspected some new plot : nor did my lord
Converse of it, as was his wont, erewhile,
When they design'd some exploit with the dawn.
At night he would not sleep, but lay awake ;
And yet he feign'd to sleep : and I, too, feign'd ;
Alert for what should hap. And when the first
Pale glimmer of the weak awakening light
Broke soft athwart the chamber, noiselessly
My lord arose ; and put his armour on ;

And took the dog-skin helmet, and his spear,
And lion-painted shield : and so stole out.
Thus much I could distinguish, with keen ears ;
Yet durst not look, nor open my shut eyes.
But quickly following, ere he could be lost,
I watch'd him wandering in the doubtful gleam ;
Until, with unstay'd feet, he reach'd at last
The fast-moor'd vessel in the quiet creek.

ALL.

Ha ! Ha !

3RD W.

And then ?

1ST W.

Then, near as it were wise,
Crept I along by shadows of the cliff,
And hid behind a jutting brow of rock,
To watch what he would do. And he, my friends,
Waited. And as I watch'd, I yearn'd to run,

To unbosom all I knew : but fear withheld.
For one by one, with helmet, and with shield,
The rest came, noiselessly, as he had come :
And it was clear this was arranged before.

ALL.

Ha ! Ha ! And then ?

1ST W.

And I, if I had left
The night-black shadow of the beetling hill ;
Or breathed too loud, or shriek'd ; should have
been like
Some easy prey the hunters, while their band
Effectually enrings it, close upon.

3RD W.

We ask not for thine history, Lemnian :
Wilt thou omit what touches but thyself.

1ST W.

And when the last was come, and each beside

His oar lean'd glad, and Tiphys by the helm ;
They launch'd not yet the craft, and only spoke
A little, and that not loudly.

4TH W.

Ah, me ! now !

What will she tell ?

2ND W.

Thou interrupt her not.

But didst thou find what held them, lingering
thus ?

1ST W.

I saw Hypsipyle come silently
From Here's shrine upon the grassy hill.

ALL.

The queen ? The queen ?

3RD W.

But did she go with them ?
Sawest thou ?

1ST W.

She went not with them in the ship ;

Nor did the priestess Heliadora go,

Her father's brother's child, who came, beside.

3RD W.

Him I, with joy, dismiss'd to Pluto's land.

Why lurk'd the traitorous sisters by the bark ?

Didst thou mark that, friend ?

1ST W.

Yea : they led with them

An old frail man, with glittering locks of snow.

3RD W.

Ha ! Ha ! Couldst thou think whom ?

1ST W.

I think it was

Thoas, of old the king.—Why smile ye so ?

Is it so wondrous strange one foot should 'scape
The crafty treacherous pit we dug for all?
And yet I know 'twas he.

3RD W.

Hear! Lemnians!

Will ye forget? Will ye forget?

2ND W.

Say on,

Woman; if there is more.

1ST W.

Receiving him

With willing reverence, from the women's hands,
They placed him in the ship. And these, awhile,—
The women,—linger'd, weeping, as they watch'd
The ship receding from the quiet shore.
For now the morn grew bright. But I, forlorn,
Clomb up the slippery cliff, to find you, friends.

3RD W.

Away ! Away ! Snatch up the glittering axe !
Set the wild torch aflame ! Let us be gone !

2ND W.

Whither, alas ! unhappy ! will ye go ?
There is enough blood spilt, to be avenged
Upon the isle : even now the doom is come.
Where will ye go ? Ah, spare the queen, just
Heaven !
Who has been thus false to us, because too true !

SCENE VIII.

ATTENDANTS.

O QUEEN, what news comes now, of what ill-hap?

We see the old nurse hastening hitherward,
With a bewilder'd look and hair unbound.

HYPSIPYLE.

Brings she the child with her?

ATT.

We think, not so.

HYP.

—It is not yet near noon : is there more loss ?
Can one morn hold more sorrow ? But she brings
News of the ship, mayhap.—Nurse, ah, me ! now ?

NURSE.

Handmaidens, lead me to the queen, I pray.

HYP.

See, here am I : but wherefore hiest thou, nurse,
With such strange haste, and with a cheek so pale ?
And is my child, the little Euneus, safe ?

NUR.

Ah, me !

HYP.

Canst thou not speak ? What harms the boy ?
Dost thou so well to leave the child alone ?
Wilt thou not speak ? See, quickly, handmaidens,
Sustain the unhappy nurse, for she will faint.
O my poor heart, why dost thou cease to beat,
As with some strange foreknowledge?—Who are ye,
Pressing, with such rude haste, unmannerly,
Within the chamber of a royal queen ?

OTHER ATT.

O noble lady, Hypsipyle, beside
The porphyry fountain, by the outer gate,

The Lemnians, wildly shrieking, seized the nurse.
And she, with struggling terror, snatch'd away
The remnant of her life : but him they took :
And,—ah, me, woe ! who could behold the
sight ?—

But he is dead, O queen : the child is dead.

HYP.

Ye would betray me, friends : why would ye do ?
What have I done, ye should deceive me thus ?
What Lemnians, shrieking wildly, stand without ?
The women would not hurt the prince they love.
The child ? the child ? the little Eunens ? dead ?

OTH. ATT.

O queen, this is heaven's truth !

HYP.

Do ye believe
This tale, handmaidens ? Think ye, I could stand,
And hear it, and not weep, if it were true ?

OTHER ATT.

The gates, we barr'd in haste, they cleave away
With many a glittering axe ; and all the roof
Flames in the wind ; and we are doom'd.—O flee !

HYP.

What means this rout ?—Now, think that I am dead.
Upon the seat his mother held, crewhile,
There sits the child. He is not weak,—he, friends.
He nods with his bright head, and they will come,
And they will go ; and do what he will bid ;
And never fret, nor rise up in revolt :
But he can rule them with a look,—my son.

ATT.

Hear ye the shouts approaching ? Flee, O queen !

HYP.

Is it the night ? Mark I not even one star ?
Joy, like the sun at noon, shone once ! and then—

Declined, declined ! till but a flickering haze
Of twilight linger'd. Can this be deep night ?
What is this sudden fear, which scares ye all ?
Flee ye, then, faithful ones : for why should ye
Die, too ? I will go weep.

ATT.

Alas ! poor queen !
She knows not what she does : she will be lost.
There is no help for her but these slow tears.
The baffled hind so weeps, whose wound is death.
Let us not go with her.

3RD WOMAN.

What do ye here ?
Have ye conceal'd her, with your guilty looks ?
Will ye not answer ? Will ye die with her ?
Speak ! speak ! or ye shall tend her soul,—by
heaven !—
On its sweet journey to the blessed fields !

ATT.

Alas ! alas ! she is within !

3RD W.

Away !

Haste we to find her, Lemnians, true hearts,
Avengers of her guilt, through fire, through smoke.

ATT.

Now they are gone within : her end is come.
The torches, brandish'd in such murdering hands,
Flash'd with less fierce a light than their wild eyes.
O handmaidens, Megæra would have blush'd,
Abash'd, beholding them. Let us be gone.
Like hell the fierce flames hiss : it is too late.
Without the gates, O sisters ; lest we die.

3RD W.

Ye gods, we breathe again ! Yet it is much
We'scaped,—O huddled troop, that cower without,

Like sheep whose fold the hungry wolf has found !
For ere we reach'd her secret sanctuary,
The blazing roofs crash'd ruin down, and fell.
Then we fled fast away. And some have lost,
In this just cause, their life. But she is doom'd.
Now will she need no funeral pyre, I think.

ATT.

How had she sinn'd, that ye, with such mad haste,
Have, in an hour, wrought what slow years should
do ?

4TH W.

Long since she took the oath : and if the king
Had died, it had been well : then she had lived.
But she was false, and hid him treacherously :
And with the priestesses of Here's shrine,
In secret harbour, since the baleful day,
He has been safe. How could she lead him, friends,
Unmark'd by us ? Now he is past our reach.

For he is wandering with the crafty guests,
Who,—as ye knew? Knew ye not this?—are
fled.

Toward Melitis, and Imbros' beetling cliffs,
Their strong oars cleave the unregarding wave.

3RD W.

Whom may the grim sea-dragons, without ruth,
With net-like slippery feet, whose blood is cold,
Drag deep to some rock fastness, and devour.
But her a fit fate took, who leagued with them.

ATT.

O Aphrodite, bitter cause of all!
Wilt thou be glad for this?—See, 'tis thy work.



PART II.



SCENE I.

NEREIDS. 1.

'N EATH sea-wet tresses our bosoms wholly
Heave for pity and melancholy,
For those who suffer, for those who die :—

NER. 2.

Mystic dances and music fashion ;
A song for sorrow, and mortal passion ;
O'erroof'd with billows, that sigh and sigh.

NER. 1.

O bright Apollo, their lorn eyes follow
Thy fiery way o'er hill and hollow :
Their night is sadder than day's a gain :—

NER. 2.

In every urn the partial Hours

Mingle blossoms of poison-flowers ;

And some for pleasure, but more for pain.

NER. 1.

Their youth is sunny : it dwells with laughter :

But who can fathom the sorrows after ?

Young rills are merry, but sea-ward flow :—

NER. 2.

O love's a wonder, like fruit-tree shaken :

But fruits are gather'd, and hearts forsaken :

Their now is bitter for long'ago.

NER. 1.

Ah, weep for smiling, if tears stay longer !

Ah, weep for loving, if hate is stronger !

For eyes that glisten, if eyelids fall !—

NER. 2.

And friendship sickens if kisses sever :

And life is little, and death for ever :

Their trust's a dreaming, their hope is gall.

NER. 1.

Wrinkled brows for a queenly palace :
Wolfsbane wreath for a festal chalice :
Tears for pearls for a breast's snow-white :—

NER. 2.

Husband's love, for a boon to sadden :
Mother's milk for a drink to madden :
Widow's wail for a bridal night.

NER. 1.

Who would blossoms, if fruit is rotten ?
Their lips are bitter with bloom forgotten :
Their hearts are sullen for joys unborn :—

NER. 2.

Their sunbeams dazzle but at sunseting :
And gods are niggard, or else forgetting
The men they fashion'd, to leave forlorn.

SCENE II.

HELIODORA.

WE saw thee launch the little venturous boat,
Aglaia, by the far-off promontory ;
Sitting upon the temple steps at dusk,
To catch the waning splendour of the sun :
We watch'd thee glide, a tiny speck at first,
Nearer and nearer, coasting by the shore :
We knew that it was thou, and we were glad.

AGLAIA.

I could not tame my restless will to let
The favouring hour go by. The gentle sea
Scarce rippled. The mild air, the glimmering
light,
And heavenly stillness, tempted me to come,
To greet you, Heliodora. And I long

To hear the truth of the ill-starr'd reports,
Touching the old king Thoas, and the queen.

HEL.

Our white-hair'd guest, as thou hast heard with
truth,—

So rumour, doubtless, trumpets in thine ear,—
Is fled this many a day. And we can tell,
No more than thou canst, whither he is gone.
But this we know,—'twas with a friendly crew.
But she, by hapless fortune, as they say,
Unpitied, unbefriended, is undone ;
Oerwhelm'd 'neath blazing rafters, in the house
Which bless'd her once, when youth with hope
laugh'd crown'd.

AGL.

Alas ! alas ! the unhappy child ! ah, me !
She has borne infinite sorrows, more than fall
To unblest women's lot ; though they must bear

Much sorrow, and hard to utter, in this world.
Child, queen, wife, mother,—and, in each, forlorn.

HEL.

The immortals, on their everlasting thrones,
Have order'd all things well: thou knowest: thou
knowest.

AGL.

I know it,—but with half-knowledge: it is hard
To read the riddles of the heavenly Ones.
Dark and inscrutable to me are their ways.
Strong, as the solemn hills, their judgments stand;
Yet, like the unfathom'd deep, them none can
sound.

HEL.

But wilt thou come within; the air grows chill:
And thou shalt look upon a sight for tears.

AGL.

Lurks here more grief behind? Will sorrow take
Some new strange fashion yet? Shall we no more

Find ease from weeping? Is it not enough,
Heliodora, is it not enough,
To have seen,—ah, me, the day!—her wretched
end?

HEL.

Aglaia, sweet heart's-sister, wilt thou come?

AGL.

Thou ledest me, with hush'd feet, to the moon-still
White chambers of the virgins. Thy deft hand
Draws stealthily the hiding veil away,
'Neath which none pass but Here's holy ones.

HEL.

'Tis here: 'tis here: seest thou?

AGL.

What is it I see?

What woman, on the unruffled couch, asleep,
Lies here, beneath the snow-white coverlet?
Her smooth locks touch her feet, in hue and gloss

Like tide-left reaches of the amber sand;
And her sad cheeks are lean, and colourless
As faded rose-leaves are; which Autumn takes,
In melancholy pity, with a touch.
And all the soft flesh is consumed and shrunk.
And weird blue shadows hover sorrowfully
Around her eyes, where weary eyelids lie.

HEL.

She has drunk deeply, as thou mayest believe,
Of sorrow's poison'd cup. But is she not
Beautiful, slumbering in the quiet gloom?

AGL.

Even as a twilight cloud, which broods above
The pale-hued sea, when o'erspent storms are still:
Or sun-kiss'd snow upon Olympus' brow,
Even when the gold is faded, and 'tis white.
But who is she, who is she, gathering here
Her wings together, like a weary dove,

Heliodora ? For this is to me
A wonder. Beauteous stranger, from what land
Bringeth she hither the long golden hair ?
Has some ship left her sick, which pass'd our
coast ;
On its return to look for her again ?

HEL.

Whom thinkest thou ? Whom ? Aglaia ? Fanciest
thou
That this can be Hypsipyle, our queen ?

AGL.

Is she not dead ? Does she not wander now
In the elysian meadows, and at peace,
Mid asphodels ? Can sorrow reach her still ?

HEL.

If this be she,—and, as I think, 'tis she,—
She lives, Aglaia. Mark, her bosom heaves
Evenly, with the life that moves within.

AGL.

Resolve me, Heliodora, this surprise.

HEL.

She, on the ill-fated day, from room to room
Goaded by dizzying grief and wild-eyed fear,
'Scaped the involving flames and crashing fall
Of carven beams, and many a gilded roof;
And did not perish, as her foes surmised :
And, hurrying frantically, did not lose
Her clearer reason wholly : for she bent
Her will and strength to prove the escape she knew,
And gain'd the wandering passage underground.
By this she led the unfriended king of old.
And so her feet, along the blinding dark,
Groped hitherward, and found us. She would
 heed
No questioning words, nor know us, nor be ruled ;
But rush'd,—like Io, ere her happier change,
When Zeus restored the woman her first grace,—

Hither and thither, frenzied with her woe :
Calling on lost Iason, and her sire ;
But most of all,—ah, pity !—upon the child.
Then,—picturing quick the little quivering limbs,
The innocent hands, crush'd feet,—with a wild cry,
She pray'd the avenging Furies to o'erwhelm
The unhappy perpetrators of the deed :
And seem'd a fury, and unlike the queen.
Then she would fiercely pluck, and twist, and knot,
Her wandering hair, dishevell'd with her haste ;
And rend her beautiful white breasts of snow ;
And bite the swan-clear flesh of her two arms ;
Until the red blood oozed from them, and dropp'd
Upon the marble floor, a ghastly dream :
Then, ever in extremes, sob like a child,
Crouching, in huddled misery, on the ground.
And we, bewilder'd, could but weep with her ;
Availing nought to check her : till her strength
Fail'd, like a dying storm, when winds grow mild.
Then mostly still she lay, on her sick couch,

Long days of tedious fever. But at times,
With hurt cry, shuddering, like a wounded bird,
She would be restless with the haunting flight
Of trailing clouds of woe, in her dark mind ;
Struggling with us, who held her. She has lain,—
The dangerous crisis of the fever pass'd,—
Three days, recovering, as we trust. She keeps
This eve a healthier sleep ; and, hour by hour,
We watch, hope-buoy'd, praying she may be heal'd.
But sister, kind Aglaia, let us leave
The slumberer now ; lest the still wings of sleep
Be flutter'd, even with whispers, though so low.

AGL.

O sight, unhappy, and happy ! My cheek burns
To touch, my lip to kiss, the unclouded brow.
Reluctantly I yield, I yield, my friend ;
Loving to ponder the sweet face awhile ;
Wondering at, and wishing to behold,
The unearthly light beneath the pale lids seal'd.

SCENE III.

AGLAIA.

THE queen awakes : sisters, awhile be still.

HYPSIPYLE.

Is the night spent, and is it day so soon ?
I was most sick and weary : I have slept
A long time, Heliodora : the bright sun
Peers with a taunting face into my room.

HELIODORA.

—She knows me ! see ! she knows me !—You
awake

Out of a long sleep, lady Hypsipyle.

HYP.

But who is this, who leans beside my couch,

With braided black locks, like the raven's plume?
I seem not to remember her, dear friends.

HEL.

Still is she, O queen, a stranger : she is named
Aglaia, amid our maiden sisterhood.

HYP.

Heliodora, I have had sweet dreams.
For I was sitting at the feet of her
That bore me,—Iphianassa,—as she watch'd
The chattering maidens busy at the loom :
And then my father, entering from the hunt,
Kiss'd me, and set me up upon his knee.
And bending o'er their toil, he wonder'd at
The richly-work'd embroidery, where they
wrought
His mother, Ariadne, who was dead.
Upon the couch she lay, as lilies lie
On some still lake, or cloud upon the hill.

Her white breasts, bared to the soft winds of
 heaven,
Heaved peacefully in sleep ; without a guess
That love, once clasp'd, could treacherously take
 wing :

While Theseus softly from the chamber stole,
On tip-toe, glancing back.—What is it I hear ?

HEL.

We hear no sound, but the meandering brook,
Babbling beneath the willows, in the grove :
Unless thou catch the sacred cuckoo's note,
That chants her love-chant on the hidden bough.

HYP.

Why should I dream, Aglaia,—for my heart
Trusts you already for the fondling hand,
Laid intertwined with mine,—why should I dream
Of Iphianassa ? For I know she waits
Lonely, in pale Persephone's dull realm.

And Thoas sail'd but yestermorn away,
In the long ship. Iason, too, is gone.
I were alone, had they not left to me
The little Euneus, and your love, dear friends.

HEL.

Wouldst thou be glad to look upon the child ?

HYP.

If he is sleeping, do not wake him yet.
And bid the crazy nurse rebind her hair
With trustier knots, which wanders loose and wild.

AGL.

Her eyes are closing : she will sleep again.

HEL.

And 'tis most well : lest reason dawn too soon.

SCENE IV.

ÆGLE.

ROUND one crag still, then we have gain'd
the glen;

Sweetest of glens in Lemnos: here the brook

Widens awhile, and runs more gently on.

There!—'Neath yon poplars, where the grass
grows long,

Hide daffodils. Iphissa, tire not yet.

IPHISSA.

Sweet Ægle, well: then, you must rest content.

ÆGL.

What heart once hoped our gentle queen could live?

IPH.

Yet death long since has skulk'd from her sick
couch:



Rose tints will paint her hueless cheek again.
While oft she sits, beneath the porch, at noon,
Watching the smooth-wing'd swallows go and
 come ;
Hearing the waves' soft rippling, vague and
 strange ;
Those two kind fostering leeches, sun and wind,
Bring her sweet health ; and soon she will be
 strong.

ÆGL.

I love to please this whim she takes for flowers.

IPH.

Dost thou recall, dear child ? She used to have
Grief-clouded looks, sad melancholy brows :
But now she notes quaint leaves, a weed, some
 worm ;

A beetle travelling up red myrtle spray ;
Faint cicale-chirp : her sense is grown so quick.

ÆGL.

Now she forgets the unlovely days outworn.

—Soft ! soft ! Iphissa ! lest your light foot crush
These violets :—O sweet scent !—Dull sickness
smoothes

Past griefs' keen edge, as mists the sharp hill-tops.
Thus oft you mark grey evening vapour curl,
Wreath after wreath, in some grim-cloven ravine ;
Till you could fancy it a quiet bay.
Can she forget ?—See ! I have stolen them all !
These, blue as her soft eyes ; these, virgin white ;
These, purple like the rocks the last light paints.
I would we roam'd green Thasos : I should find
Sweet-scented rushes, and low galingale,
And creeping lotus, which the bees love well.
Does she forget, thou thinkest ?—her sire ? her
child ?

IPH.

Nay, nay : scarce so. Vague-shaped, bewildering
thoughts
Rise, like frail vapours in a storm's grim van :

Yet quickly melt, and pass. I have beheld
Her eyes fix absently, her lean cheek flush :—
There goes a stray white halcyon from the sea !—
Then, if one speak, the unbidden guests are gone.

ÆGL.

Rest here awhile, by this clear spring, which wells
Up, through soft moss, the cypress' shade makes
cool ;

While I entwine into a wreath for her
These golden-hearted lilies, moist and white.

SCENE V.

HYPSIPYLE.

THE keen air makes me faint: and yet, I think,
'Tis sweet to wander on the glittering shore.

Here, after sad sick days, to breathe anew
The odorous air; and welcome once again,
On face, and fluttering bosom, and lean hands,
The softly-fanning wind and genial sun;
Beguiles my weak heart with a strange delight.
Sweet from the slopes comes perfume of wild
thyme:

Shore-loving myrtles stretch green hands to me;
And humming bees drone music in mine ear.
It makes the past seem like a dream, and all
The hopeless longings and unheal'd regrets
Are soothed to gentle memories for a while.

And all the hovering sorrows, that will come
Like vultures, when they settle, seem far off.
I am almost happy, I ! How can it be ?

NEREIDS.

O snake of grief, laid slumbering
Among the lilies of her breast's snow,
Awake not yet, awake not yet,
The gentlest tremor of regret ;
But let the innocent hurt thing
In joy a little while forget
The griefs of long ago.

HYP.

Where can the old man be ? In some bright isle,
Where danger lurks not, sitting in the sun :
Mid flickering shadows of the vines, which make
A happier harbour than our rocky shore.
With tenderest love, and pity for his woes,
The new-found friends, I think it, shield him
well.

Iason, in the long-beak'd ship, has sail'd
By many a shore and windy sea ere now.

NER.

She sees not the black ship afar,
Sailing toward this
Lone isle, pitied by sun and star,
From Thracian Melitis.
Nor, if she saw it, would she surmise
Who comes, drawn hither by her sweet eyes.

HYP.

Will he come ever again? Do I but dream?
Or will he seek me, in some strange disguise?
Surely he will be sad to look on me,
His lorn, lost child! Him I would clasp again
With these weak arms,—ah, me!—before I die!
For I believe that I shall die ere long.
At least disguises will not me deceive,
For I shall know him underneath them all.

But may the gods forbid the treacherous news
Of me should reach him in his sheltering home.
Then he would pine with unconsolated despair;
And welcome death's quick foot; and never think
His poor child waited, with wet eyes, in vain.

NER.

Will she look on the tiny cloud,
The little cloud the sailors fear,
Blowing hither, as dark as night :
Which trails its blackness like a shroud,
And creeps, with stealthy movement, near;
And blots the sultry light ?

HYP.

But thou, kind heaven, in this leave me forlorn :
And never, hearkening to his prayer, restore
Iason. Blushing red, for shame, could I,—
Remembering that wild oracle of old,—
Listen, and hear him asking for his child,

To look upon him with a father's eyes?
And who would shield the unhappy women then
From his fierce anger and a wretched end?
Why am I here? Why am I here? Ah, woe!

NER.

Nereus' children, Doris bore,
In pale sea-caves, in the motionless
Deep, with coral-paven floor,
Is she not a noble heart,
The hapless Lemnians to bless;
Pitying, whom she might have cursed?
Whom, no doubt, despair, in part,
Fiercely madden'd at the first.
Wind-wild sisters, whose bright locks
Float like weeds on wave-beat rocks,
What is this,—can ye descry
Doubtful trouble in her eye?

HYP.

He will return! He will return! Ah, me!
Ah, kind sea, hide me, 'neath your waves, away!

NER.

See, how a sudden thought
Makes, with a little strain,
Strange discord in her brain,
That has been overwrought.

HYP.

What if his ship have touch'd the Colchian land,
And they have stow'd away the glittering prize ?
What if, already, on the homeward track,
The quivering oars row glad ; their longing eyes
Wide-strain'd toward Lemnos ? Whither shall I
flee ?

At least, at least, he must not find me here !

NER.

Nereids, lily-wristed,
With lilies round your brow,
Mid wave-green leaflets twisted,
What would the child do now ?

HYP.

What ship comes steering hither,—and will it sail
To westward of the isle, and hear me call?

Would it would hear, would it would mark me

now,

And snatch me, with its rescuing arms, away!

NER.

White-foot sisters, look with me

How she rushes along the sands;

Wetting her feet in the heedless sea!

She is beautiful, as she stands,

Stretching in vain, in her eagerness,

White arms made to clasp and to bless,

And fleshless trembling hands.

What would she? What would she now?

She can see the waves break round

The motion of the far-off prow;

But she cannot hear their sound.

See ye, see ye, she has found
The tiny boat, on the pebbled beach !
Surely it is a wild mad hope,
For some succour, out of reach !
She unfastens the little rope !

Ah, me, woe ! ah, me, woe !
O'er the billow will she go ?

Like a river underground,
Hears she not the winds grow loud ?
How they mutter, sisters,—hark !—
With a vague mysterious sound !
With the elemental strife
Red light quivers in the cloud ;
While the heavens are still and dark.
She has trusted her sweet life
Madly to so frail a bark.

She is drifting, away, away !
They will not see her !—woe, the day !

Foam-born sisters, whose green hair

Shines with many an amber gem ;

She was true as she was fair :

Mortals took of her no care ;—

Made too exquisite for them.

She will weep and sigh no more.

Lay the body on the brink

Of their brook ; and they will think,

While their breasts with anguish bleed,

Like a wreck, or like a weed,

Waves have toss'd her on the shore.

SCENE VI.

HELIODORA.

WHAT is it ye say ? what say ye ? priestesses ?
Did we not leave her sitting in the grove,
Upon the bench he loved ? This is most strange.

PRIESTESSES.

Thither we ran, to find her, at the first.
We sought her in the accustomed spots ; we call'd
Her name, above the fury of the wind.
The ilex-darken'd grotto's sheltering gloom
Conceal'd her not ; and we could hear no sound.

HEL.

What, has she wander'd, with a wandering mind,
Lured by the mystic muttering of the sea ;
And is she crouching underneath some cliff,

Beat with the rain, like a lone flower, forlorn ?
Or has the ruthless courier of grim death,
From hell-black bosom of a stormy cloud,
Slain her with light-swift dart ? But will ye haste,
This way and that, to find her ? Will ye bring
The poor child hither !—Away !—Will ye be gone !
Nor linger, shuddering, with your frighten'd eyes,
Poor-spirited ! fearing the storm ! ah, me !

SCENE VII.

IPHICLES.

WE two were well-nigh given, a pleasant food,
To slimy monsters of the deep, my friend.

THOAS.

'Twas black as midnight, when the stars are blind ;
Weeping, behind dull mists, lost Artemis.
How suddenly the overwhelming storm swept
down ;
And pass'd as quickly as it came ! 'Twas well
The skirts of darkness wrapt us in their folds.
The cruel miscall'd-women of the isle
Would not behold us hovering by their shore.

IPH.

The sailors guard our vessel. I perceive

E'en now the little sheltering shrine is near.
These green and tree-clad slopes, mid which it
 lurks,
Seem half a wonder on this rocky strand.
But art thou still resolved? Wilt thou not dread
To imperil this dear hope, thine only one?

THO.

Since, as thou knowest, the rumour of the fate,
That took my grandchild Euneus, reach'd us all,—
The fate that left charr'd ruins, and such wreck
Of desolation, where arose the home
In which my fresh youth laugh'd, my old age
 smiled,—
Me one hope cheers, a solitary one,—
As thou well sayest,—that she survived the hour.

IPH.

Wilt thou not spare it, then? 'Tis well to keep
That which we have; and not to venture all,
Even if we look to compass more than all.

THO.

Trembling to think, I must resolve my doubt.
For who lives still—if, as we dare surmise,
She breathes,—save me, to baffle her great woe?
And canst thou truly call the hope a hope,
O'er which this sword of fear hangs by a hair?

IPH.

Seest thou the white-robed priestess, as she steps
To meet us, from the porch? It is too late.

THO.

Ask thou: my heart would fail me. I will seem
A stranger at the first. Thou speak with her.

IPH.

Priestess of Herè, shall we seek in vain
Hypsipyle, the queen, in this sad isle?

HELIODORA.

Have ye not heard the mournful news?

THO.

Ah, me !

IPH.

We heard wild rumours that her foot had pass'd
O'er Lethe wave, but doubted of their truth ;
Skill'd in the mystery of the hidden way,
By which the unhappy and grief-laden queen
Was wont to visit your sweet home of old.

HEL.

Ah, whence come ye ? Who are ye ? that ye know
This truth ?—Ah, me ! Whom do I look upon,
With white hair vainly hid ? 'Tis he ! 'Tis he !

THO.

Yield us, at least, this answer,—if she lives.

HEL.

Come, then, with me : ye shall behold her, friends :
Even if it be ye look on her no more.

THO.

What speaks she, with strange lips, oracular,
And ominous eyes of sorrow? But the child
Lives still: we shall behold her.

HEL.

Will ye come?

IPH.

The long-robed handmaidens, why do they stand
Around the foot of the white couch we see;
With drooping eyebrows, sadly? Willow boughs
So lean, so droop, above the brook they love.

HEL.

Alas! poor king! why hast thou found her here?
For thou, at least, wilt scarce be comforted
To look on her still face, upon the couch,
In her last sleep. But will ye stand aside,
And let the strangers keep your watch awhile?

AGLAIA.

Ah, me, friends, look ! how the old man has
thrown

His arms about the neck of the dead queen !

HEL.

O sister, let the white head rest to-day
Upon the cold breast of his child once more.

IPH.

So leave him : it is better so. So let
The pent-up anguish of his grief have way :
To ease the o'erflooded heart, which else would
break,
Like river-dams at high flood-tide. But thou,
Unfold the story of her hapless end.

HEL.

The sudden storm o'ertook her, as we think,
Wandering, her mind perplex'd, upon the shore.
For on the beach they found her, like a pearl,

Unprized. The ruthless-hearted, hungry sea
Must stealthily have seized her, and engulph'd
Her helpless beauty in his briny wave ;
Then cast her, weary of the lifeless toy,
Upon the foam-besprinkled marge again.
As yet, as yet, we have not combed away
The yellow sand from her long locks adrip.

AGL.

The old man stirs not. Stranger, wilt not thou
Speak to him, and lift him gently ? For I fear
For this great woe.

IPH.

Speak, Thoas ! Wilt thou speak ?

AGL.

He answers not.

IPH.

Speak, Thoas ! Hearest thou ?

HEL.

He answers not : he hears not.

AGL.

Lift him, now,
Quite gently.—See!

HEL.

His tearless eyes are closed!

IPH.

O priestesses ! O women, known before
For pitying hearts ! O sad sight to behold !
The last dark messenger of lingering fate,
The gods bid down to mortals from their heaven,
Has been with him, and pass'd by us, unseen.

HEL.

Lay one veil o'er them both :—be still ! be still !
Who shall fore-read, or impiously arraign,
The scroll the everlasting Fates have writ ?

With ashes mingling in the selfsame urn,
They two shall rest. She, like a blighted flower,
At whose white root the unpitying worm has
 gnaw'd,
Is wither'd, ere her prime, too soon ! too soon !
Tears are not here misplaced. But can ye think
It would have been so well for him to stay,
A sapless trunk, the tempest has outworn ?

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